

Pitch Black

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Pitch Black

by Nick Oftime [archived by [HPFandom_archivist](#)]

Summary

AU. When the war is over, Severus Snape has to come to terms with being a slave to Sirius Black. "From now on, your only choice is whether to be a broken toy of many or a valuable possession of one"

Notes

Note from SeparatriX, the archivist: this story was originally archived at [HP Fandom](#), which was closed for health and financial reasons. To preserve the archive, I began manually importing its works to the AO3 as an Open Doors-approved project in August 2016. I e-mailed all creators about the move and posted announcements, but may not have reached everyone. If you are (or know) this creator, please contact me using the e-mail address on [HP Fandom collection profile](#).

no quarter

Warnings: non consensual sex, dubious consent, corporal punishment, torture, abuse.

Author's Note: there are many slave/master stories where the abuse/rape turn into mutually satisfying lovemaking, and then the master and the slave fall in love and live happily ever after. this isn't one of those stories.

no quarter

He walked barefoot. He was dressed in a paper-thin prison gown that barely covered the top of his thighs.

He was flanked by an Auror on each side, with two more trailing behind. He knew better than to ask questions, or inquire as to his destiny. The last year had taught him that.

Criminals did not get to choose.

In spite of his resigned self-talk, when the charmed entrance opened to them, revealing the Grimmauld Place, Severus shuddered instinctively.

Him?

“Your new Master. Sirius Black, the Head of the Order,” one of the Aurors said maliciously. “You should be grateful that he is taking such an interest in your wellbeing.”

The other guard laughed. “Gratitude?!!” Severus was nudged rudely towards the entrance, and he stumbled a little. “If you thought things were bad for you so far, wait till Black gets his hands on you.”

“Please, no.” He stopped and looked at his guards pleadingly. “Take me back to prison. Anything – anything but this – please...”

A blunt blow followed, and he felt his mouth filling with blood.

He fell silent and looked around. The Muggles in the block scurried back and forth, clearly unaware of the grotesque spectacle playing out under their very noses, courtesy of Disillusionment charm. But even if not for the charm, what could he do? Scream on top of his lungs? What would he scream? *Help, I'm a condemned murderer in need of a magic wand?* Ah, wouldn't that go well.

All right, maybe he could scream something like, *There's a bomb!* Or *Help, I'm being kidnapped!*

Still, the odds that Muggles would take his screams seriously were low. About ten percent, he estimated. The odds that a group of well-meaning Muggles would *win* a fight against the four Aurors were even lower. About zero-point-one percent. The odds of being punished and nearly flayed alive for screaming and attracting attention to himself... ninety-eight percent.

Severus Snape kept his mouth shut.

The door opened, and Sirius Black stood in the doorway. He stared grimly at Severus and then at the Aurors.

“He's here,” one of the Aurors said needlessly.

“Yes, I can see that,” Black replied dryly, scrutinizing Severus head to toe. “Well, don't just stand there, old friend,” Blacks said as his lips twisted into a semblance of a smile. “Enter. You'll be enjoying my hospitality for quite a while, I am glad to say.”

He stepped through the doorway and entered the large dark hall that seemed oddly silent. “You can leave,” Sirius said, and the Aurors nodded to him. If any of them questioned the wisdom of leaving Sirius Black alone with Severus Snape, the traitor to the Order, and the murderer of the late Albus Dumbledore, none seemed too eager to question the decision of the Head of the Order.

“Follow me,” Sirius said evenly, and Severus trailed behind him, entering the large sitting room with a fireplace. The sitting room contained a couch and two armchairs. Sirius took one armchair, and stared at Severus appraisingly, as if trying to evaluate his state of mind. “Come here,” Sirius offered, and Severus stepped forward.

Maybe he'll kill me quickly, a hopeful thought flashed through his mind.

“I'm going to untie your hands. You won't attack me, will you?” Sirius asked with a playful note in his voice.

Severus shook his head mutely. Reckless, futile acts of defiance were a thing of the past. As all prisoners, he was under a complex *geis*, that prevented him from attacking his captors, magically or physically.

“I want to hear you say it,” Sirius insisted.

“I won't attack you,” Severus said numbly.

“*Master*,” Sirius supplied in a surprisingly gentle tone of voice, causing Severus gulp at the implication of his error. *Punishment*, the word crossed his mind, and he choked down a sob, as he repeated, “Master.”

“Very good,” Sirius said approvingly. “Who knows, we might actually get along after all these years. Hmm?”

“Yes, Master,” Severus said.

“All right then.” Sirius' hands rested on his waist, and turned him around. A moment later the restraints were spelled off, releasing his hands. Severus let his arms drop, not daring to rub his wrists or make a single unauthorized movement. He could feel the other man standing behind him, uncomfortably close. Another moment later, Sirius rested his hand on his back. Severus flinched at the touch involuntarily, causing Sirius to chuckle.

“My, my. I suppose you're all broken down and harmless, ey, Snivellus?”

There was no room left for shame.

“I think so, Master,” Severus said sincerely.

“Hmm. You look rough. What did they do to you?”

Severus shuddered involuntarily, as the memories of the past year flooded him. Torture, and more torture, at the hands of the embittered survivors of the Order, torture more gruesome than he had ever anticipated at anyone's hands.

“Many things, Master,” he whispered.

"I imagine. Tell you what. Lie down by the fireplace and have a nap. I'll wake you in the evening, and we'll discuss the terms of your stay with me."

There was a note of something like sympathy in Black's voice, whether fake or sincere, Severus couldn't tell. It didn't matter.

"Yes, Master," he said, overwhelmed with gratitude at the simplest permission. He couldn't recall last time he simply slept – without being restrained and left in a torturous, awkward position until he passed out. "Thank you, Master."

"You're welcome, Snape," Black said.

Severus walked over to the fireplace and stretched out on the floor next to it. Old memories advanced and launched an assault, eager to remind him how he had come to be here, in this place, in this current state.

.....

"You're asking me to kill you."

"Correction. I am ordering you to kill me. Severus, the situation requires desperate measures."

That was the bloody understatement of the millennium, Severus thought grimly. The curse had spread through the older wizard's entire arm, beginning to affect his torso. Severus managed to contain it for now, and alleviate most of the pain, but the situation looked grim, for all of them.

"I'm not a mediwizard, and euthanasia isn't one of the services I provide. If you want a quick, painless death, take a glass of the Autumn Nightshade Potion."

"Your sentimentality – don't glare at me – is not advantageous right now. We both know that you'll need to do something drastic in order to redeem yourself in Voldemort's eyes. It has to be dramatic. Public. Unquestionable. You saving Sirius Black's life in the battle of the Department of Mysteries was..."

"Easily enough explained," Severus said dryly.

That was a lie of course. In fact, after an hour of Cruciatus at the Dark Lord's wand Severus had begun to wonder whether the filthy mutt's life had been worth the aggravation. Still, the Dark Lord seemed to have accepted the explanation that Severus had provided. Thinking quickly on his feet, Severus had advised the Dark Lord that Sirius was his lover, and privy to priceless information that nobody else in the order had possessed, save Dumbledore himself. He had promised that saving the man's life would result in them having access to that information. Just how he was going to deliver the promised priceless information was another issue, but at least, he was still in the game for the time being.

"You have to kill me," Dumbledore said gently. "You want to win the war, don't you?"

Bastard, Severus thought.

"And then what, Dumbledore? What will happen should I survive the war? How am I going to explain this to the Order? Or am I only useful as a weapon, and once the war is won, I should prepare to be discarded, and sent off to rot in Azkaban?"

"Far from it. I will make arrangements for the proof of your innocence to be available once the

war is over, or even before then, if need be.”

“What sort of proof?” Severus asked numbly, as the inevitability of Dumbledore's impending death finally began to set in.

“I need to research the magic involved. We'll speak again soon.”

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Well done, Dumbledore, Severus thought absently, as something that almost seemed like resentment prickled at the edges of his awareness. He quickly banished the uncomfortable emotion. His current life left no room for resentment, no room for anger, no room for anything other than simple, basic, animalistic drive to survive.

The warmth of the flames reached him, and a moment later, he sank into the dark dreamless void that held no hopes, no terrors, and no regrets.

To Be Continued Soon.

home is the prey

Author's notes: Snape/Sirius

home is the prey

He woke from the feeling of a boot poking him in the side. He opened his eyes. His surroundings were dim, almost dark, and the only light came from the flames of the fireplace.

“Wake up,” Sirius demanded. “You've slept more than four hours. Time to move on.”

Severus bolted to sit up, feeling dizzy from the change in position. Sirius towered over him.

“We need to talk,” Sirius said in no uncertain terms. “I overheard your pleading with the guards in the street.” Sirius smirked slightly. “Yes, my surveillance charms do extend that far. I heard you wanted to go back to prison. Was it that much fun?”

Severus kept his eyes on the floor.

“Answer me.”

“No,” Severus muttered, battling with the nausea rolling in at the mere mention of prison. Still, in spite of the endless torment, the prison *did* seem like a marginally better option. The people who tormented him there had no personal reason to hate him. The daily violence that came was simply retribution for him killing their leader. Sirius... had personal reasons to bear a grudge, in addition to *everything else*.

He was startled to realize that Sirius was studying him intently.

“Let me explain something to you,” Sirius said. “I have no intention of punishing you for your treason, or your misdeeds. Judging from the looks of it, you've had enough. If you choose to remain here, the experience will be a great deal less physically... demanding. What I want to know, however,” Sirius continued softly, “is whether or not you and I will be fighting. I've got no energy or desire for a battle of wills. The war has been hard on all of us. I've seen too much, been through too much to have a battle raging in my living space. You understand what I'm saying?”

“I understand,” he whispered, even though he really didn't understand Black fully. All prisoners were bound by a *geis*, that physically prevented them from fighting back against the captors or the guards. Any attempt to use physical force, or even magic, should he ever lay hands on a wand was stopped by the magic of complex, intricate spells that had been placed on him the day he was arrested.

“You have a choice,” Sirius said calmly. “If you want to return to prison, I'll send you back immediately. If however, you choose to stay here, you'll need to cooperate. For the lack of better words, I want you to start thinking of yourself as *mine*, in every respect of the word. You'll need to obey me, and endeavor to please me. You'll surrender your body, your mind, and your emotions *to me*. In exchange, I'll make your life bearable. I'm not saying I won't hurt you, but when I do, it won't be excessive, and it will not harm you. You'll be safe with me.”

He felt a gut-twisting wave of anxiety, as he listened to Black's calm, slightly amused voice. He lifted his eyes finally, to look at the face of his nemesis that was still handsome and youthful, in

spite of the weariness that seemed to have set in after the years of the war.

“What is it that you want with me?” Severus asked.

Black's smile faded, to become replaced by a somber expression.

“What I've always wanted. I want you to be mine.”

The words hung between them, the hidden danger of them permeating the dark silence of the room.

Finally, when Severus managed to ask a question again, it was just one word, *Always?*

“Since we were young children, back in school,” Black confirmed calmly.

“You had a funny way of showing it,” Severus said.

Black's eyes flashed danger at him. “You're forgetting yourself,” he said coolly. “And that was sarcasm.”

“I'm sorry, Master,” Severus said quickly, cursing himself under his breath.

Sirius snorted. “You really do have a mouth on you. But we can work on that. To put things very simply, if you choose to remain, I'll set some rules that you'll have to obey, and institute punishments for breaking of them, as well as rewards for good behavior. You'll see to my pleasure, and in return I may let you have some of your own. If I see you growing discontent with your situation, if you start baiting me or disobeying me, I'll send you back without a moment's hesitation. Is that quite clear?”

Severus nodded quickly.

“What do you choose then?” Sirius probed. “Choose to stay, or choose to leave now, go back to the familiar hell of prison?”

“I don't want to go back to prison,” Severus confessed tiredly. It was probably a cowardly thing to say, but he was too worn out to care about dignity or appearances.

“I didn't think you would,” Sirius conceded. “One more thing, Snape. Do *not* push your luck. I will not be manipulated. So, as much as a peep from you about your supposed innocence, and you'll be gone. I'll as far as I'm concerned, you gave up your old life the moment you'd cast the Killing Curse on Dumbledore.” The danger in Black's eyes continued to intensify. “From now on, your only choice is whether to be a broken toy of many, or a valuable possession of one. Understand?”

“I understand,” Severus said quickly. This part he could understand very well. The part about not being allowed to defend himself, or to resist – that was very clear. It was the the promises of safety and pleasure that seemed a great deal less comprehensible at this point.

“Good,” Sirius said simply. “Will you be mine then?”

“Yes. I'll be yours.”

“*Master*,” Sirius reminded.

“Master,” Severus repeated quickly.

Sirius nodded.

“Wait for me.”

Severus remained sitting up on the floor by the fireplace, waiting with a mixture of dread and resignation.

A moment later, Sirius returned, holding a bowl of soup in his hands. The scent of fresh, warm food seemed to be filling the entire room. Severus watched cautiously while Sirius brought the bowl to his own lips and sipped.

His stomach grumbled loudly, but he said nothing. It wasn't uncommon for him to be taunted with smell of fresh food, only to be denied. Complaining or begging never did any good in the matter.

“Hungry?” Sirius asked.

Severus nodded mutely.

“Say it.”

“I'm hungry, Master.”

“What did you eat in prison?”

He shut his eyes, not knowing how to answer. Fighting other inmates for moldy, rotten raw vegetables and bread, scouring the walls of his cell for any sign of movement – hoping to see something that could be caught and eaten...

“Whatever I could find, Master,” he finally gave the truthful, if incomplete response.

Sirius nodded. “Ask to eat.”

“May I eat, Master,” Severus said, readying himself for denial.

Carefully not to spill, Sirius placed the bowl in his hands. “Drink up,” he said.

For a few seconds, he simply stared at the bowl of broth, not daring to lift it to his lips. He looked up cautiously, wondering what kind of price would be exacted for this. A moment later, his tongue touched the warm, nourishing liquid, and nothing mattered. The only thing that mattered was satiating the hunger, no matter the consequences.

He forced himself to eat slowly, prolonging the experience as much as he could, feeling his too-shrunken stomach react to the unusual presence. When he was finished, Sirius vanished the bowl with a flick of his wand and nodded for Severus to follow him.

Severus did, walking slowly throughout the deserted, dark hallway of the Grimmauld place, surprised against by the eerie silence of the ancient house.

“The portraits,” Severus said finally.

“Got rid of them.” Blacks' voice was tired and grim.

“All of them?”

“Yes. And you're forgetting your manners.”

“I'm sorry, Master.”

From that moment on, and until they reached the bedroom door, there was only silence, disrupted by nothing but the sound of two sets of footsteps.

to be continued soon

the bed of silence

Author's notes: Sirius/Severus

the bed of silence

The large door opened to the bedroom, and Sirius pointed to the bed. Even though Severus had expected that, he still balked inwardly at the simple gesture. Still, he didn't hesitate, but simply dropped to the bed and lay face down, feeling his body sink into the pleasant softness of the mattress. He heard sounds, as Sirius was looking for something.

An incantation later, the lights in the bedroom increased in intensity. Even with his eyes shut, Severus could feel the brightness invade his vision.

“Remove your robe.”

He did so quickly, exposing his backside and back. He knew what was there: a gruesome collection of cuts, torn and clean, strap marks, bruises and burns. The bed dipped slightly when Sirius sat next to him, and ran a hand over his back, his fingers connecting with the many indentations on Severus' skin.

“Too much damage,” Sirius whispered, as his fingertips trailed the length of a fresh cut, causing Severus to gasp and flinch at the contact. “Relax,” Sirius said. “I won't hurt you tonight, unless you provoke it.”

Severus took in a deep breath, and let it out slowly, willing himself to be still. Next time the probing fingers touched his injuries, he managed to make no sound.

“I'm going to heal your scars and injuries,” Black said evenly. “From now on, your body is mine, and any marks it bears will be mine alone. Understand?”

“Yes, Master.”

He heard Sirius reach for something, and apparently smear a substance on the palms of his hands. A moment later, the sticky substance was transferred to the injured skin on Severus' back, causing a tingling warmth to blossom throughout his body.

There was an emptiness that came with this, a kind of loss that he had no words for. His history, however gruesome and horrifying, was being erased, taken away from him, replacing the evidence of his torment with freshly healed epidermal layer.

Still, the touch of Sirius' hands was careful and gentle, soothing the aching, damaged muscles, stretching out the knots of tension that had formed over the last twelve months, and delivering more and more of the warm, relaxing substance to the sites of former agony.

He breathed evenly and deeply, letting it all go. The past no longer held any meaning.

Over the last year, he had come to realize that where pain is concerned, there's no more past, no more future, no more sin, no more righteousness, no more redemption, and no more shame. In pain, there's only the eternal *now*, and enduring it.

The large, heavy hands of his owner rubbed soothing circles on his back and the top of his legs. Eventually they moved to his buttocks, giving them a slight, possessive squeeze. Understanding what was expected, Severus parted his legs obligingly, and waited for the inevitable agony of penetration.

The fingers stroked his cleft, and circled around his anal ring.

“Is there scarring inside?” Sirius asked matter-of-factly.

“I don't know,” he said quietly into the cover. “Master,” he added quickly. *Fuck.*

A single, sleek finger pushed inside him, and he relaxed his sphincter to accommodate it. He could not suppress a furious hiss when the fingertip rubbed the wounded walls of his rectum, sore from the months of brutality.

“Definitely,” Black murmured, and the finger withdrew a moment later, only to return shortly with more of the same substance.

He held still while the healing salve was pushed deep inside him, shutting his eyes, trying to ignore the scalding wave of shame that rolled in with the intrusion. He should have been used to it by now, and for the most part, he did get used to it... but prison was different. He got used to being rolled over to lie on his belly, being beaten, penetrated with brutal rage, beaten some more, and finally left alone.

The kind of invasive intimacy was new...

He bit into his lower lip, and tasted the metallic flavor of his own blood again.

The finger pushed deeper and touched his anal wall, brushing against the prostate. He grunted quietly, feeling himself become half-hard. That, too was not unusual. The involuntary physical reaction delighted and amused his tormentors tremendously...

The finger withdrew eventually. “Turn over,” Black commanded.

Severus complied again, keeping his eyes shut. He shuddered involuntarily when the hands began to rub his chest.

“You'll need to become accustomed to my touch,” Sirius informed him. “I will not have you flinching and wincing every time I touch you.”

He held still, while the hands continued to rub circles on his chest, making their way down to his abdomen. It felt pleasant... it would probably feel more so, if he wasn't anticipating the pleasurable touches to become brutal and cruel any moment.

“Part your legs and bend your knees.”

He obeyed in complete silence, exposing his genitals. The hands stroked the fronts of his thighs and then, one hand moved to cup his testicles, rolling them softly between the fingers. Another hand circled his cock and stroked it softly, depositing the substance on the shaft.

“Feels good?” Sirius asked quietly.

“Yes,” he said. “Master.”

“Good. Relax now. Your ordeal is over.” Sirius said, amused. “Get up and go to sleep. You may

sleep by the fireplace. If you get hungry during the night, you can eat whatever you find in the kitchen.”

Severus's mind reeled again. *That was it?*

Sleep? Food? He couldn't believe the stroke of good fortune that was suddenly bestowed upon him. He sat up on the bed, and stared at Sirius blankly.

“What?” Sirius asked, returning his gaze.

He swallowed hard, looking for words.

“Is this it, Master?” he asked hesitantly, suddenly afraid that he must have misunderstood. “Did you want me to...”

“Not yet,” Sirius said.

He nodded, as the anxiety continued to mount. He wondered why Sirius didn't take him right away. Did he find his body wanting, his appearance lacking? That was probably it, he thought, he was deficient, too sick, too injured, maybe tomorrow he'd be sent back to prison?

Sirius stared at him thoughtfully. “Don't worry,” he said, lifting his head to brush a stray strand of hair off Severus's face. “You'll make an excellent pet if you work at it. You have nothing to worry about.”

He nodded slowly. Sirius's hand trailed the length of his face and rested against his lips. A split-second later, he found himself kissing those fingers.

“Thank you, Master,” he said sincerely.

“You're welcome, pet. Go sleep now.”

He walked out of the bedroom, leaving his robe behind. Once he reached the fireplace, he stretched out on the floor next to it, completely nude, and placed his chin on his hands. For a brief moment, a small part of him, a part that remembered the former life, issued a small scream of protest, admonishing him not to enjoy his current situation. He shut his eyes and banished the thought.

He was safe.

Sirius was his Master.

Sirius *wanted* him.

The latter realization brought an inexplicable intimation of danger with it, but Severus was too tired to ponder it. He simply fell asleep.

to be continued soon

the brave new world begins

Author's notes: Snape/Sirius

the brave new world begins

When he woke up, there was a brief wave of disorientation. He couldn't understand why he was warm, not hurt, not especially hungry, and well-rested. In fact, the only discomfort he was feeling was the persistent pressure in his bladder, demanding to be relieved.

He stayed silent and sorted through the most recent events. Ah yes. The prison was over. He was with Sirius. For now. He issued a brief sigh of relief at the realization and sat up. When he opened his eyes, he saw that Sirius was already awake, fully dressed, and sitting in one of the large armchairs, staring at him intently.

“Good morning,” Sirius said.

“Master,” Severus said. “I need to...”

“Of course,” Sirius said softly. Follow me.”

Sirius nudged him inside a large, old-fashioned bathroom. A clean towel and a clean, short slave tunic, a copy of his old one, were hanging on the door hook.

“Take care of your needs and bathe,” Sirius said. “Try to keep it under an hour. We have a lot of ground to cover.”

“Yes, Master,” he said, surprised at how easily the words came to him.

Sirius rested his hand on his shoulder. “See what I mean?” he said softly. “Excellent pet.”

“Thank you, Master.”

Once Sirius left him alone, he took a piss, for the first time in a year without being watched by anyone.

Once done, he approached the enormous antique bathtub that could have easily held half the Hogwarts faculty. It was filled with water. Clean water... he stuck his hand inside. Warm water. He climbed inside. He shut his eyes and immersed himself in the water, realizing that he'd never be able to take it for granted again. He spent a long time simply lounging around, not thinking about anything other than how good it felt.

When he felt the water cooling off, he left the bathtub, dried himself off, put on the clean tunic that Sirius had left for him, and headed into the sitting room.

“Good,” Sirius said approvingly, looking at him. “You look well. How do you feel?”

“I feel fine.”

“Excellent. Now, I'm going to establish a few rules. First, you will treat me with absolute respect. I will not tolerate any rudeness. Second, you'll endeavor to obey all my orders to the best of your ability. I will not tolerate any resistance. Third, you'll maintain a positive attitude. You'll not

wallow in self-pity, or brood. Fourth, you'll learn how to please me in bed, and you'll learn to enjoy it. Fifth, you'll become accustomed to being mine, to being owned. Any questions so far?"

"No, Master," he said.

"Good. In exchange for your compliance, I'll ensure you'll get food, sleep, and medical attention, should you fall sick. I'll also ensure your physical safety. Is this reasonable?"

"Yes, Master."

"Now, no matter how hard you try, from time to time, you'll fail, and a punishment will be necessary." Black glared at him quizzically. "You understand that, don't you?"

He couldn't bring himself to speak up, so he simply gave a silent, embarrassed nod.

"Very good. I'm going to give you a sampling of what you can expect, should you disobey."

With a flick of the wand, a small padded bench appeared in the middle of the room. Next to it, on the floor, three tools materialized one after another: a two-pronged tawse, a bundle of birch twigs, and a cane.

Severus stared numbly at the tools of discipline that had been long gone from the wizarding schools by the time he started attending. Even in spite of his utter humiliation, he was surprised. He didn't expect Black to have foresight and deliberation about this sort of thing. He had anticipated that Black would simply curse him, or beat the snot out of him on an impulse whenever he felt like it.

"Place yourself over the bench," Sirius ordered.

For a fleeting moment he considered refusing, but the memory of prison and all that it entailed was still too fresh in his mind to push his luck. Severus hurried to obey. A moment later he was bending over the bench, his belly pressing against the hard leather padding. Sirius stood behind him, and lifted the hem of his robe, exposing his backside.

He clenched his butt-cheeks involuntarily, expecting the blows to start falling. Instead, he felt Sirius's hand on his bottom, giving it a tight, possessive, but not cruel squeeze.

"Don't worry," Sirius said gently. "It'll hurt some, but I won't harm you. And if I do make a mistake, I'll heal you right away. I promise. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Master," he agreed, wondering if he could dare to believe something like that.

"The first tool is the tawse," Sirius said, pressing the instrument to his buttocks. "If you make a sincere mistake, or if I need to issue a warning, this will be the tool of choice. Ready yourself."

A moment later, the tawse hit against his buttocks, bringing an explosion of heat with it, undoubtedly raising welts. He managed to make no sound, and simply absorbed each impact, feeling the burning intensify. Six smacks later, Sirius stopped the punishment and stroked the heated flesh with his fingers.

"The birch is next," Sirius said matter-of-factly. "If you continue to make the same mistake over and over again, or if you neglect to learn what I need you to learn, this will be the tool you'll experience."

A moment later, the thin, angry twigs of the birch lashed his buttocks. He hissed involuntarily, rocking his hips, hoping to find some measure of escape in the movement. Six of those, and the birch was laid to rest as well. Severus issued a deep breath.

“Finally,” Sirius said, “If I find you disobeying me on purpose, or deliberately resisting me, or forgetting your place, I'm sure you'll find the cane to be extremely persuasive.”

A moment later, the persuasive tool struck against already burning backside, causing it to erupt into agonizing flames. Severus bit into his lip, managing to suppress a shout, but he couldn't help the tears that formed in his eyes and streamed down his cheeks of their own accord. The cane continued to strike, causing his entire body to shudder and convulse. By the time the sixth blow was delivered, he was still silent, but his entire face was drenched with tears, and the entire backside was burning like an autumn field caught in wildfire.

He saw blurredly that Sirius sat down next to him on the floor and took his face in his hands.

Severus blinked over and over again, making a desperate attempt to banish the tears, remembering all too well the unflattering nicknames that Sirius and his classmates used to think up just for him. Certainly if any situation was ripe for taunting or berating it was now ... but Sirius didn't say anything to add to his humiliation. Sirius simply held his chin with one hand, and wiped away his tears with another.

“You did very well, pet,” Sirius said. “It's over. Do we have an understanding?”

Somehow, he managed to offer a weak *yes* in response.

“Excellent. You have no idea how happy I am to hear that. You have made excellent progress. ”

Sirius guided him to stand up, allowing him to lean on his arm. The tunic fell back into place, covering him up. Sirius chuckled in amusement.

“No, no, this won't do.”

Severus glanced at him in surprise.

“Whenever I discipline you, I want to see the results,” Sirius said, lifting the back hem of his garment again, and tying it off to reveal his backside. “You look good like that,” Sirius said kindly, cupping his aching, swollen buttocks in his hands and squeezing. “Very good.”

He wondered how he could possibly look anything short of ghastly after the year of prison, not to mention five years of the war that preceded it, but he supposed it was a good thing that his Master was pleased with him.

Sirius continued to stroke him and soothe his heated flesh with every caress. His face burning with shame almost as much as his sore, punished buttocks, Severus nonetheless found himself surrendering to his owner's possessive touch.

to be continued soon

the perfect symmetry of blood and secrets

Author's notes: Snape/Sirius

the perfect symmetry of blood and secrets

Sirius sat on the armchair near the fireplace and snapped his fingers, much the way an owner would when calling a dog to his side. Severus went to him, knelt down quickly, and looked up at Sirius quizzically.

“We should talk, I suppose,” Sirius said softly. “I have some questions for you. If you answer them truthfully, I'll let you ask some questions as well. Sounds fair?”

“Yes, Master,” Severus said.

“All right. First question. Why did you betray the Order? Tell me the truth.”

The horror at being asked that question again rolled in in waves, threatening to drown him. Back in prison, he'd learned quickly that maintaining his innocence was a sure way to earn himself the worst mistreatment imaginable. However, he also learned that confessing his guilt and begging for forgiveness led to much the same outcome. Eventually, he found the answer that appeared to appease his captors and result in the least amount of pain.

“I was never loyal to the Order,” Severus said. “I played both sides for as long as I could.”

“I see,” Sirius muttered. “Well then. What happened when you killed Dumbledore?”

“I ran,” Severus said. “Harry Potter, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger chased me. We dueled. I fought them off, and ran again.”

Sirius stared at him unblinkingly. “Why didn't you kill them?”

Severus bit his lip. For a moment, he was tempted to try to bring up his innocence, but he remembered Black's warning all too well. *I will not be manipulated. So, as much as a peep from you about your supposed innocence, and you'll be gone.*

“I wanted them to carry the word back. To the others. I wanted everyone to know what I've done.”

“You were proud of killing Dumbledore,” Sirius said.

“Yes. Proud.” He nearly choked at the words.

“Why did you choose to come back at this time?” Sirius asked.

Severus gulped. He had no explanation for choosing to return at this time, except for the slight persistent magic that Dumbledore had established, drawing him back home. But he couldn't mention that to Sirius. He would never believe him... he'd be enraged, possibly sending him back to prison. Severus shuddered slightly at the thought.

“I was tired, I suppose,” he said softly. “And scared. The war wasn't going well. I thought I could save myself by surrendering, and volunteering any useful information I had.”

"A cowardly thing to do," Sirius said bluntly.

"Yes, Master," Severus agreed. "It was."

Sirius nodded. "Fine. Do you have any questions for me?"

"Yes, Master. How many died?"

"Too many," Sirius said grimly. "All of the Weasleys are dead, save for Charlie and Bill, who went quite insane after recovering Ginny's and Molly's bodies from the battlefield, and got slightly worse once Arthur and the twins died. I'm sure you've noticed how unbalanced they are. I bet they came to pay you a visit in prison. Were they blaming you for the other Weasleys' deaths?"

Severus nodded mutely.

"Well then. Also dead, Tonks and Remus. Hermione Granger, Luna Lovegood, some others whose names I don't remember. Hagrid, Poppy, Flitwick, Slughorn, McGonagall. There were a few Slytehrin students who had changed sides and fought on our side. Greengrasses, Zabini, Goyle, Pansy Parkinson and Draco Malfoy were among them. They're all dead as well."

Severus bowed his head, as the names of the fallen comrades-in-arms and students registered with him. Sirius was watching him grimly, in furious silence, and he knew instantly, it wasn't safe to grieve for them now.

"What about Harry Potter?" Severus asked.

"Harry," Black's face looked dangerous. "Why do you want to know? I suppose you *care* for him?"

"No," Severus said quickly. "Just ... curious."

"Ah. Well, he made it. Before he died, Dumbledore had kindly advised us that Harry was Voldemort's Horcrux. That was a pain-in-the-arse to deal with."

"How.. did you deal with it?" Severus asked.

"Slughorn, Moody and Bill worked together. Developed a special potion and a series of experimental spells, all designed at removing the Dark Soul-Fragment from a receptacle. We'd experimented on the other Horcruxes first, and finally, Harry underwent the treatments. We were successful, of course, but... let's just say, you should try not to stare at him next time you see him. The treatments mangled him quite a bit, though he doesn't seem to mind. He's an Auror, and the best one there is," Sirius said with obvious pride.

"I see," Severus murmured. He smiled inwardly at the news that Lily's child had found the way to beat the odds and survive.

"Any more questions?" Sirius asked.

"Yes." He drew in a deep breath, before daring to ask the final question. "When we were back in school... why did you try to kill me... back in the Shrieking Shack..?"

Sirius shook his head tiredly. "Severus, I don't know if you'll believe me, but I never wanted Remus to kill you. I wanted him to bite you and turn you."

It sounded strange, Severus thought, but he could hear the truth in Sirius's words.

"Why did you want me to become a werewolf?" he asked.

He saw Sirius was blushing slightly. “Stupid,” he said quietly. “I thought maybe if you were more like Remus, somehow things would be different, and we'd ... become friendly.”

Severus bowed his head, pondering the road not taken.

“Maybe I should have let him bite me,” he said finally.

To his surprise, Sirius actually chuckled at that.

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The conversation with Sirius went surprisingly well – in that he didn't get punished, or beaten, or even scolded. Still, it left Severus unsettled and anxious, as the memories of the past had resurfaced again. He could barely make the connection between himself, in his current, exposed, needy state, and the way he used to be back then...

Dumbledore knew that Severus hated relying on others, but he had managed to convince him there was no other choice.

.....

“I've researched the magic involved, Severus,” Dumbledore said. “Blood magic. We will need to establish a blood-bond between you, and four Custodians who will guard your secret with their lives and souls.”

“That blood-bond,” Severus asked, “does it work like Fidelius?”

“Similar, but stronger,” Dumbledore said. “In essence it conceals the secret inside their blood, ensuring it cannot be extracted by Legilimency, or Veristaserum, or even torture. It will protect your cover, should one of them be captured by the Dark Lord.”

Severus winced, not wanting to think of anyone of his comrades falling to such a fate. But he knew that saying something like that would only lead to further accusations of sentimentality, and he had no use for that.

“I don't like this,” he said instead, praying that Dumbledore would reconsider, and not use him as a tool of his own death. “War is dangerous business. What if all four die? Then what?”

“The bond, Tego, ensures that should three of your Custodians fall, the magic will activate and draw you home, while it is still safe to come back. The same magic will also hold the remaining Custodian back from taking any risks, to ensure that she, or he, is alive upon your return to testify for you.”

“I see.”

“Severus, I can tell how painful this is for you,” Dumbledore said gently. “But we must try. What other choice is there?”

“None, I suppose,” Severus conceded. “Very well. Who should I choose as my Custodians?”

Dumbledore looked at him with sadness. “I'm afraid the magic doesn't allow that. The bond is dependent on you not knowing. The magic of the bond relies on perfect symmetry. The four encircle you and keep your secret. However, by the same token, their own status must be kept from you to create that perfectly symmetrical magic.”

“I see,” Severus said again. “So if I find out...”

“Tego will be dissolved, and the secret will no longer be protected by magic. It'll be vulnerable to Legilimency, Veritaserum, or it could be extracted by torture. I'll ask that you do not try to guess.”

Severus smirked. “Fine, Dumbledore. We'll play it your way, one more time.”

“One last time, I hope,” Dumbledore said with a rueful smile.

“One last time,” Severus agreed.

“I'll need a few drops of your blood to establish the bond.”

Severus stretched his hand out and Dumbledore's wand opened a small incision on his wrist. He stared at the droplets of his own blood collecting in a crystal clear vial, to be mixed and bound to blood of four people who'd be sworn to guard him and protect him.

.....

Severus lifted his head to see Sirius staring at him.

“You're brooding,” he said. “It's not good for you. If I see you brooding again, I'll punish you.”

“I'm sorry,” Severus said calmly. “I'll try not to brood.”

to be continued soon

taken

Author's notes: Snape/Black

taken

The rest of the day was surprisingly uneventful.

Severus had expected Sirius to want him to clean, or cook, or do some other chores, but Sirius appeared to be unconcerned about that, and was content to be doing things together.

Maybe Sirius simply missed having company, Severus thought absently, beginning to accustom to his strange new life.

Throughout the day, Sirius paused whatever they were doing to touch his backside and stroke it, rubbing away the ache, soothing the welts with every caress. Sirius was patient and deliberate with him, half-seducing and half-coercing his obedience, and Severus found himself relaxing into his owner's hands more and more.

Pitiful, the inner voice screamed. Pathetic.

He didn't care much.

His old life was over, he reminded himself.

Tego, the bond of protection had failed.

Or maybe he himself had failed.

He took too long to come home.

Why did he wait so long to return?

Just over a year ago, he felt the magic of Tego drawing him home, and yet, he lingered. Weeks turned into months as he kept trying to gather some more information, trying to orchestrate a few more acts of sabotage, trying to see if he could quietly save more prisoners before making his final escape, before running one last time. Good ideas, badly executed. In the end, he had gathered too little information, hadn't done enough damage, hadn't saved enough people. And in the end, he had to run.

It seemed that he always had to run in the end.

By the time he made it back, most of the Order was wiped out, and Hogwarts had fallen. Apparently, his last Custodian (whoever he or she was) had been killed as well. Severus wondered who they were, and who the last one was. Perhaps Poppy or Hagrid, or Flitwick? Or Molly... His heart ached as he remembered those four people, the closest he'd ever gotten to having friends, aside from his friendship with Dumbledore.

He shook his head, banishing dangerous thoughts from his mind.

"What's on your mind?" Sirius asked.

“Nothing, Master,” Severus replied. “Just old memories.”

Sirius's hand rested on his waist. “It doesn't make sense to indulge in those. What once was, can never be again.”

He willed himself into stillness. The time of running was over.

“I know, Master,” Severus said simply.

When evening came, Sirius's demeanor changed again, but not without an explanation.

“Evenings are different,” Sirius said. “In the evenings, I'll expect you to serve me. You'll cook. You'll serve me dinner. Then you'll eat. After that, you'll do anything else I require of you. Understand?”

“Yes, Master.” The words *anything else* brought the familiar pang of danger with them.

Severus cooked dinner and served it, trying not to twitch too much under Sirius's unwavering gaze. He swore inwardly as he realized that his fingers, that had been broken and re-healed far too many times had lost their usual dexterity. Cooking a simple meal was a difficult task, and he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that he'd never brew potions again. A small twinge of loss came with the recognition, but Sirius said something approving to him, and the pang of regret vanished, replaced with the familiar numbness.

Once the dinner was served, Sirius had a few bites of the food and nodded approvingly, pointing at the other chair at the kitchen table. Severus sat down quickly, wincing as his swollen, aching backside connected with the rough surface of the chair.

They ate quietly together, and then, Sirius leaned back in the chair and smiled.

“I feel like celebrating,” Sirius said, pointing at the tall wine-rack in the corner of the kitchen. “The bottle of top is Hogsmeade special mead... the last bottle left.”

“The last?” Severus asked in confusion.

“Hogsmeade was burned down a few days after Hogwarts had fallen,” Sirius said. “You didn't know?”

Severus shook his head. He really didn't know much about what had happened lately. News were scarce during his last year with the Dark Side, and nonexistent once he was imprisoned.

“No matter,” Sirius said gruffly. “Bring it, open it. Pour me a glass.”

“Yes, Master.”

He brought the bottle to the table and opened it. Slowly and carefully, he began to pour the beverage into the glass, when Sirius's hand reached for him and stroked his aching buttocks. The touch startled him, and jerking involuntarily, he dropped the priceless bottle. It shattered with a loud sound, the precious mead spilling on the floor.

He stared down at the mess in mindless terror, the vision of prison reawakening in his mind instantly.

He barely saw Black pull out his wand and vanish the mess.

“Come here,” Sirius said in no uncertain terms, and Severus walked towards him, stopping in front

of his chair.

“Why are you so tense?” Black asked quietly. “Is my touch that repulsive to you?”

“I'm sorry, Master,” Severus said sincerely. “I didn't mean to...”

Black stared up at him.

“You're still tense. Do you think I'm going to be upset with you over this?” Black asked with amusement. “A bottle of fermented honey?”

Severus shrugged silently, not knowing what to say.

“It means nothing,” Sirius said softly. “Stuff doesn't matter. The only thing that matters is that you're mine.” His thumbs trailed the length of the pronounced welts on Severus's backside. “That's all I care about. You. Being mine.”

He stood up abruptly, and planted a brutal, almost violent kiss on Severus's lips. To his own shock, Severus opened his mouth obligingly to welcome the intrusion, feeling nearly dizzy with relief.

When Black dragged him into the bedroom, he issued no protest.

Severus barely had a chance to react when Sirius ripped his tunic off, and shoved him to lie on the bed, face down.

He lay on the bed and waited. He thought he heard Sirius undress, and a moment later, the man's knee pushed his legs apart.

Sirius leaned forward, and Severus felt the man's tongue licking his shoulder. He tensed again, in spite of his best efforts, and gathered up fistfuls of his sheets, trying to still himself.

Sirius's hand rested on his lower back.

“You're thinking I'm going to hurt you,” Sirius said simply. “Who had you in prison?”

“Don't remember everyone,” Severus whispered, as nauseating horror struck home again. “Moody. Kingsley. Bill. Charlie. Diggle. Some others. Came... to... punish me.”

“You're thinking about them now. You're thinking this will be just like that.”

“Yes,” Severus admitted reluctantly. In the back of his mind, he always thought about the prison. Every gruesome little detail of it had been burned into his memory, singed into his body.

“It won't be like that,” Sirius said, sliding his hand down Severus's back. “I don't want to harm you, or punish you. All I want to do is make you mine.”

Severus felt a single sleek finger slip into him, and probe deeply inside, curling slightly, coaxing pleasure out of his tired body with every flick of the fingertip against his prostate. A moment later a second finger joined the first, and the caresses intensified, becoming more firm, more insistent, more demanding. The fingers made a scissoring motion, stretching out the sides of his rectum with slow, agonizing deliberation. To his own surprise he realized that Sirius wasn't simply depositing lubrication to make penetration possible, he was preparing him for the act with great care, as one would a true lover.

He shut his eyes and allowed it to happen. It went on for a long time, probably longer than was necessary, but Sirius seemed in no hurry at all, as he continued working him, urging his body to

make space for himself.

When Sirius's fingers abandoned him, he issued a surprised gulp. Lying face down, with his legs parted, with Sirius's hands resting on his sore buttocks, prying them apart, he thought he'd never felt as exposed and open to anyone.

A moment later the strong hands took a hold of his waist and guided him to turn over. He felt those hands on his bottom, squeezing the sore flesh, lifting his hips, bending his knees. A moment later, Sirius slid into him effortlessly, and Severus lay on his back, with his thighs pressing against the man's abdomen, his ankles resting against Black's shoulders.

The thick head of the cock inside him pressed against his prostate, and pleasure radiated from it, like circles of ripples in the pond.

Severus stared up to see Sirius looking directly at him. There was a heart-wrenching, almost nauseating intimacy to this position, but Severus didn't know what to say, or even think.

Sirius stroked his thighs softly, and collected his cock into his hand.

"Move," Sirius ordered.

He strained and pulled away slightly, and allowed himself to fall back, impaling himself on Black's erect member. There was a burst of pleasure deep within him, and Sirius stroked his cock firmly to reward him for his compliance.

"Again," Sirius said.

He repeated the movement again and again, allowing Black's cock to continue nailing that spot over and over again, trying not to be too aware of the rather inescapable fact that he was, for all intents and purposes, fucking himself with Sirius Black's prick. With each thrust, Black rewarded him by delivering a firm stroke to his aching, erect member.

The two pleasures continued to mount, growing together and intertwining, until finally, they reached their peak, and Severus felt himself erupting in Black's hand. The orgasm claimed the leftovers of his physical strength and he went limp with Black's firm cock still buried deep within him.

Sirius chuckled approvingly. "Wasn't so bad, was it?" he asked.

A moment later, his knees were bent again and brought to his chest, lifting his bum higher. Holding his legs down, Sirius began to fuck him in the earnest, pulling out of him completely and driving into him, over and over again at agonizingly fast speed.

He didn't get hard this time, but the familiar, shameful, passive pleasure of the penetration was still there. A part of him knew he should be mortified, but for the most part, Severus didn't care. It was bearable. And for the moment, that was good enough.

A few minutes of excruciatingly fast fucking, and Black came, flooding him with his release.

"Good," Black said, gasping for air. "Excellent."

He really didn't know what to say, so he kept his mouth shut. Fortunately, Black didn't seem to care.

"Go to sleep, pet," he said, pushing him off the bed.

He left in silence, headed to the sitting room and dropped onto the floor by the fireplace.

He used to feel helpless and powerless back in school, and during the years of the war... truly, he hadn't known the meaning of powerlessness and helplessness until now.

He rested his cheek on the back of his hand and shut his eyes.

When he fell asleep, he dreamed of being a second year student in McGonagall's classroom. She was berating him, scolding him for sabotaging a Gryffindor student, and threatening to take points from Slytherin. He didn't care. He didn't need her to be happy with him, or like him. He just needed her to be alive. All he could do was stare at her with an idiotic grin on his face, feeling deliriously happy to be seeing her, and knowing that he'd give anything just to keep hearing her angry voice for as long as he could.

to be continued...

forbidden memories

Author's notes: Snape/Sirius

forbidden memories

Two months went by.

Severus was surprised to have gotten used to Black's company. He got stronger, gained back some of the weight he'd lost in prison.

Black wasn't exactly horrible to him, Severus had to admit. In the space of two months at Grimmauld Place, Severus got beaten exactly twice.

The first time was after he cried out Dumbledore's name in his sleep. It wasn't quite a claim to innocence, but it was close enough, Black had said, as he continued to strike his arse with the cane, finally driving him into silent tears. Oddly enough that did the trick, and from that day on, Severus managed to keep himself quiet while he slept.

The second time was more unsettling, and more brutal.

Black left for the morning, and Severus roamed the old, enormous house aimlessly, feeling lost without orders or direction. He came upon an old photo album, and opened it.

The photographs of the people long gone mesmerized him, and he spent several hours, turning the old, yellowish pages, until he finally saw the last picture in the album. It was a picture of Lily, James and Remus, sitting under a tree on Hogwarts grounds. Remus was sitting a few feet away from Lily and James. James was leaning against the tree, with his legs stretched out, and Lily's head was in his lap. James was playing with her hair, and Lily was laughing.

He had forgotten how fiery red her hair was... and how green her eyes were. All he could do was stare at her, not even caring that in this photograph she was with others. He could swear he heard her soft laughter echoing in his memories.

Gone, all gone, all three of them gone...

He wasn't surprised when tears came. He always wept when he remembered her, but this time, he might have simply wept out of jealousy that the three of them had managed to meet death bravely and quickly, rather than waste away and disappear bit by bit, while trying to hang on to the remnants of their sanity.

Absorbed in his own thoughts, Severus didn't notice Black approach, and was taken by surprise. The photo album was ripped out of his hands, and Sirius backhanded him brutally.

"What did I tell you?" Black demanded, towering over him.

For the life of him, he didn't know how to respond, and another blow rattled him. For the next several minutes, Black simply continued to hit him, without any explanation or reason. There was an agonizing cracking of the ribs, a few punches to the face that made his eye swell up, obscuring his vision, and a few brutal kicks that threatened to break bones. When Sirius finally tossed him onto the floor and removed his belt to whip him, all Severus could do was bless his good fortune at

the change of pace and endure the lashing.

When his back, butt, thighs, chest and even arms were covered in deep red welts, Sirius grabbed him by the hair, pulling him up into a kneeling position. Grunting against the pain of broken ribs, Severus braced himself for a lecture on how he was unworthy to even look at the photographs of Black's friends. But when Black spoke again, Severus was stunned to hear the words that came out of his owner's mouth.

"You've forgotten who you belong to," Sirius stated flatly.

"I belong to you," Severus said quickly.

"Not that one could tell by the way you were staring at *her*!" Black hissed. "After all these years, you still stare at *her* like a lost puppy, trying to find his owner in a crowd of strangers!"

"I'm sorry," Severus said quietly, still trying to come to terms with the fact that Black was jealous of the woman who was his best mate's wife, and who had died years ago. He gasped quietly when Black pulled his head back by the hair, and used his left hand to pry his mouth open.

A moment later, Sirius's erect cock slid into his mouth, and Sirius began fucking his mouth violently, forcing himself deeper and deeper into his throat. Fortunately Sirius didn't last long, and sent a stream of hot semen down his throat, nearly causing him to choke. When he was done with Severus, Sirius simply shoved him away, and walked off, slamming the door.

Half-hissing, half-sobbing through the pain of his injuries, Severus crawled to his usual spot by the fireplace, and found solace in the familiar location.

It wasn't until evening that Sirius finally showed up again, and sat by his side near the fireplace. When Black's hands connected with his injured sides, he saw stars, and choked down a yelp. Black pulled out his wand, and cast spells on his injured ribs. Once the worst of the damage was gone, Sirius guided him to sit up.

"I'm sorry," Sirius whispered tiredly. "I really am."

"For what?" Severus asked with sincere confusion.

"I broke my promise to you. I promised not to cause harm. I promised to punish you appropriately. I'm sorry..."

"Doesn't matter," Severus said tiredly, and it really didn't matter. A beating was a beating. As far as pain went, it didn't compare to what he had seen in prison, and he wasn't even bothered much by it. "You're wrong about her, you know," Severus said suddenly. "I know I could have never been *hers*."

"But you wish you could have been," Sirius said grimly.

"No. I haven't in a long time," Severus said sincerely. "Not after what I had done."

"What did you do?" Sirius asked him.

Severus bowed his head, resisting the urge to bury his face in the knees. He'd kept that secret from everyone. Only Dumbledore knew.

"I am the one who passed the prophecy to Voldemort," Severus confessed bitterly, and braced himself for the worst. Certainly the Sirius Black he used to know would have killed him on the

spot for less. "I'm the reason she and James died. I warned Dumbledore as soon as I learned they were in danger – but..."

He wasn't surprised when Black's hand clutched his throat, cutting off his breath, threatening to crush his larynx.

"I take it back," Black whispered angrily. "All my apologies to you, Snape? I take them back. I should really kill you for this."

As much as Black's violent grip allowed, Severus simply gave a silent nod, feeling agreeable to the idea. But a moment later, Sirius released him, and looked away.

"What good would that do?" Sirius muttered tiredly. "I just wish they were still alive, both of them."

"All of them. Even Lupin," Severus muttered disgruntledly, suddenly realizing that in a strange, angry way, he missed Remus.

Sirius nodded curtly and stood up. "Sleep now," he said, before walking away.

Severus issued a deep sigh, lay on his side, and shut his eyes.

When he fell asleep, he dreamed of the departed.

He started dreaming of Lily and James, but somehow, they changed, and morphed into Remus and Tonks. Severus kept chasing the two of them across Hogwarts grounds. He didn't exactly know why, he just knew that he needed them, more than he had ever needed anyone else in his life. However, whenever he was about to catch up with them, they disappeared from sight, and he was left empty-handed and alone.

to be continued...

vertigo

Author's notes: Snape/Sirius

vertigo

Another month had passed, and Severus began to lose track of time. If not for the sex, he might have ceased being able to tell the difference between night and day, too. But so far, the sex was frequent, and as days went by, they fucked in almost every room of the Grimmauld Place, on every surface imaginable, and some that at first seemed unimaginable.

Severus found himself looking forward to sex with a kind of desperation that was new to him. He finally dared to believe that Black really was going to keep him for a long time, and not get bored with him quickly and send him back to prison.

His only frail attempt at disobedience happened when Sirius attached a pair of restraints to the headboard of the bed. Severus saw them, the manacles that very closely resembled those he'd worn back in prison, until his wrists were dislocated and chaffed raw, and shook his head mutely at the sight.

"I do not recall giving you an option," Black said. "Get on the bed."

"No," Severus half-pleaded, half-denied, feeling more and more sickened.

"What the fuck is wrong with you *now*?" Sirius demanded, sounding irritated.

"I cant," Severus said, confident that he was about to lose the contents of his stomach any moment. "Prison. Restraints. Can't..." He was all too aware that he was babbling mindlessly, but forming coherent statements was beyond his ability at the moment.

"You had a bad experience in prison. Big deal. Get the fuck over it," Sirius said.

For some reason, the angry demand, coupled with the sight of the restraints, brought back something that Severus had begun to forget entirely: anger. The anger welled up suddenly and unexpectedly, and for a brief moment, it obscured everything else: fear, shame, and even common sense.

"What's wrong, Black!?" Severus spat at his owner. "The *geis* and the beatings aren't enough? Do you still need *more* to feel powerful? Are you really that pathetic?"

He knew that he'd have to eat those words the moment they left his lips. Black gave him a strange look and walked away from him, leaving him alone in the bedroom.

Severus slid to the floor and leaned against the wall, hugging his body with his arms, and shutting his eyes.

This was it, he thought. This was the end. The gruesome threat of prison, along with daily torture, starvation, cold, and filth was looming close once more.

Suddenly he thought it was rather ironic. His fear of the artifacts that reminded him of prison was going to send him back to prison... just how *stupid* was he?

He wondered if there was a way to talk Sirius out of sending him back.

He stood up and walked to the sitting room unsteadily, where Sirius was sitting in one of the armchairs, waiting.

He slid down to the floor, kneeling before his Master.

“What do you want?” Sirius demanded angrily.

“Punish me. Then bind me. Do with me what you want,” he said, wondering if the offer sounded as weak and pitiful to Sirius as it did to him.

“Why should I?” Black challenged him. “Why should I do any of that, rather than just send you back to the hellhole where you rightfully belong?”

He didn't know how to answer that, and stared ahead numbly. *Too late*, he thought. *Too late*.

“Because I'm yours,” Severus offered hesitantly, readying himself for rejection.

When Sirius grabbed him and threw him over the small punishment bench, he could have laughed with relief. He'd expected the cane, but Sirius chose the birch this time, flogging him furiously with it. He didn't understand why at first, but when the flogging continued for a good half an hour, setting his back, arms, butt, thighs and legs ablaze, he finally understood – Sirius didn't want it to be over quickly.

Later that night, face down on the bed, his wrists chained to the headboard securely, with Sirius's tongue tracing the welted, aching flesh, he found himself drifting off into a strange, unfamiliar state that felt like flying, or falling, or maybe a bit of both. The room was spinning around him, and his surroundings became less and less real. Eventually the world around him disappeared altogether, and the only things left in his universe were the fading ache of the lashes, and the moist heat of Black's tongue, sliding over the marks on his body.

When Sirius finally was done with him, and sent him to sleep by the fireplace, Severus could barely find the strength to walk back.

Aching and hurting all over, he fell asleep the moment he hit the floor, and he dreamed of McGonagall. In his dream, he was a child again. She held him in his arms, and cried over him. That was strange, as nobody to his knowledge had ever cried over him, not even his own mother, after his father would beat him. But the dream-version of McGonagall wept over him, and that confused him. He looked up at her and told her he was fine. For some reason, it only made her cry harder.

.....

Something changed that day for Severus. He no longer viewed himself as a separate person from Sirius. For all intents and purposes, he started viewing himself as an extension of Black. From that day on, he obeyed Sirius without any hesitation. He didn't even *want* to defy him. All he wanted to do was obey, and keep things as they were.

However, his obedience aside, he still had the dreams.

He dreamed of Tonks, who would morph her nose into a hooked, grotesque imitation of his, causing the entire gathered Order to burst into laughter. He remembered being furious with her at making fun of him after he'd delivered priceless information to the Order in spite of Voldemort's Cruciatus punishments becoming more and more frequent and brutal, as the Dark Lord's suspicion

of him continued to grow. But now, in his dreams, all he could do was stare at Tonks longingly, realizing that her making fun of him didn't matter at all.

He dreamed of Remus as well. Severus dreamed that he was chasing Remus across the Hogwarts grounds with a vial of Wolfsbane in his hands, loosing the blasted potion after being smacked by the Whomping Willow. He used to be terrified of the man who'd turned into a Dark Creature every full moon, and used to loathe him for being able to inspire that much terror in him. But now, in his dreams, there was no fear, and no scorn. All he wanted was to catch up to Remus.

When he didn't dream of his fallen comrades, he dreamed of prison, and of Dumbledore's death. Over and over again, he dreamed of the old wizard collapsing under his Killing Curse, and over and over, he woke up in cold sweat. He had learned not to cry out in his sleep, he had learned not to cry, he had learned not to say anything about Dumbledore at all. But he couldn't learn not to dream of him.

Severus would have asked for the Dreamless Sleep potion, but didn't. He was afraid that Black would ask about the content of his dreams and punish him, or worse, send him away.

In his day-to-day life, he adjusted to being owned, body, mind, and soul. Only his dreams continued to plague him and betray him. But no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't help those.

to be continued...

the parable of the viper

Author's notes: Sirius/Snape

the parable of the viper

Several weeks later, Sirius advised Severus that Harry Potter was going to come over for dinner.

Severus received the news apathetically. Over the last four months the only person he saw and interacted with was Sirius Black. For all intents and purposes, Sirius was his entire world. He didn't even care that Sirius brought him a change of normal clothes and urged him to get dressed appropriately before Harry arrived. He did, of course, and the Muggle trousers and shirt felt strange on his body after several months of nakedness and near-nakedness.

"Behave yourself, be respectful, and don't stare," Sirius admonished him.

It turned out that the admonition not to stare was not superfluous at all. When Harry Potter entered the Grimmauld Place and headed to Sirius to embrace him, Severus barely managed to suppress a gulp of horror at the sight. Potter's entire face was disfigured, with scar tissue exceeding the healthy skin. His lips were misshapen as well. In fact, the only thing that remained the same were Harry eyes, green and brilliant, glowing with fierce brightness on the damaged face that no longer resembled that of James Potter, or any human being.

Harry intercepted his gaze and told him, "Take a good look, Professor Snape. This is your Lord's doing. You should be happy. Are you?"

"I don't understand," Severus muttered.

Sirius glared at him briefly. "Remember I told you about the potions and spells to drive Voldemort's soul-fragment out of Harry?"

Severus nodded quickly. Yes, Sirius did tell him, but he'd forgotten.

Harry's lips moved upwards to form a terrifying smile. "Yes, Professor. You see, Voldemort's soul-fragment became *aware* as we were trying to get it out. It kept trying to hold on to what it perceived to be its rightful home."

"I'm sorry," Severus said uncertainly.

Harry ignored him. Instead, he turned his attention to Sirius again.

"So," Harry said coolly. "You're now shagging Dumbledore's murderer. Why?"

"Watch your tongue," Sirius snapped. "I didn't invite you to start a fight."

Harry grinned. "I don't want to start a fight. What I want to know is why you waited a whole year to get him out of prison? Were you waiting until he became an expert at sucking cock?"

"Harry, stop," Sirius said.

"Stop what?" Harry asked with a kind of malicious innocence that Severus remembered all too well in James.

“Don't hound him. Don't humiliate him. I mean it. You don't know what he's been through. You don't know...”

“I know exactly what was done to him,” Harry said pitilessly. “Bill and Charlie made it their point to advise me of every little detail. How he spent nights either in a pool of his own filth, or suspended, until his bones went out of joint. How he wasn't allowed to bathe for months, and would only get scourgify spells so that he wouldn't smell foul when they fucked him, which they did, day after day. How they broke his fingers, over and over again, only to heal them and break them again.”

Sirius stared at Harry incredulously. “And you *still* don't think he's had enough?”

Harry shrugged. “Dumbledore is *still* dead, isn't he? And now – you're coddling his murderer, treating him as your little pet? That's not like you.”

Sirius's face grew dark. “Everyone makes mistakes, Harry.”

Harry folded his arms on his chest and looked at Sirius in amusement. “It was a mistake then? One of the most brilliant duelists in the world made a mistake, ey? He confused Avada Kedavra with Episkey? Happens all the time, does it?”

“Harry, enough,” Sirius demanded, but Potter paid him no heed.

“Look at me!” Harry shouted suddenly, and to his shock Severus realized that Harry was addressing him. He lifted his eyes to meet the gaze of Harry's eyes that glowed with bright rage on his disfigured face. “Tell me, why did you betray the Order?”

Severus looked to Sirius for direction.

“Answer him,” Sirius said grimly.

“I was never loyal to the Order.” The familiar statement emerged from his lips easily, and it barely felt like a lie at this point. “I was... playing both sides...”

“Really?” Harry asked quietly. “Why would you do such a thing?”

“I was afraid, I suppose. I wanted to play it safe.”

“Play it safe,” Harry repeated. “That's funny. Tell me one thing: if you wanted to play it safe, why didn't you simply run away? Neither side would have bothered to look for you if you simply decided to vanish, or fake your own death. Why didn't you?”

Severus froze in silence. He wondered if Harry was goading him into making some sort of confession that he'd be punished for later. Not knowing how to answer, Severus leaned forward on the chair, and hugged his body with his arms, feeling nauseated, trying to banish the vivid images of prison from his mind.

Sirius rested his hand on Severus's shoulder and turned to Potter. “Enough. Go home, Harry. Drop by when you had a chance to calm down.”

“Maybe I will,” Harry said standing up abruptly, and looking at Severus one more time. “By the way, Professor Snape, don't think that I'll take my eyes off of you for a moment. This house is being watched. The moment you try to run, you'll come face to face with my team of Aurors, and myself. Remember that, won't you?”

“That's unnecessary,” Black snapped. “He won't run from me.”

Harry laughed. “There's an old fable, Sirius. It's about a farmer who finds a viper freezing in the snow. He brings the viper home, and revives it, hoping to make the viper his pet. As soon as the viper awakens, it bites the farmer. As the man is dying, he asks the viper, *Why did you bite me?* The viper says, *Why are you surprised? You knew what I was when you brought me home.*”

Sirius shook his head. “You don't know him at all.”

“But you do?” Harry asked contemptuously. Before Sirius had a chance to answer, Harry slammed the door hard and departed.

Severus continued to sit on the chair, frozen, unable to move. He flinched slightly when Sirius stood behind him and embraced him.

“I'm sorry,” Sirius whispered. “I really am. I should have sent him away much sooner. But... I could never know when to say enough is enough and walk away from an argument.”

He wanted to say that it was all right, that it didn't matter, but instead, Severus found himself sobbing tearlessly and hoarsely, and his chest was hurting as he did.

“Severus? What is it?” Sirius asked, pressing his cheek to his face.

“Can't... can't stop,” Severus whispered, and his hands clawed on his face, leaving scratches. “I'm sorry – I'm sorry... what Potter said... Dumbledore... prison... what I did... what *they* did to me afterwards... I try to please you, I try to forget... can never forget.... remember everything, always in my head, can't get it out of my head... in my dreams, I see it and scream.... when I wake up, I don't remember where I am... too much... too much... can't stop... and when I don't dream about the prison, I dream about him...”

“Dumbledore,” Sirius muttered. “You dream of Dumbledore.”

“Yes... dream of him fall...”

“Shh.” Sirius hugged him tightly, and spoke to him with a gentleness that Severus never thought him capable of. “It's all over now. Whatever happened is in the past. You're safe now.”

Feeling as if his entire mind was unraveling, Severus turned around and sobbed unashamedly on his owner's chest. “I didn't want to do it – please don't punish me – I didn't want to do it – please believe me! I didn't *want* to kill him! He *made* me do it- don't send me away! I know I'm not supposed to defend myself, or say I'm innocent, but you've got to believe me! I wouldn't have killed him if he didn't ask me to, didn't order me to... he made me do it! I couldn't have done it unless he made me- even then, I barely could! Please, believe me!” He kept saying, growing more and more panicked. “Please, believe me! You've got to believe me!”

Sirius arms tightened around him and held him closer. “Shh. It's all right, Severus. Calm down. I believe you.”

to be continued soon

petit treason

Author's notes: Sirius/Snape

petit treason

He could barely feel it when Sirius guided him to the bedroom, and helped him climb into the bed. He was drowning in mindless horror at everything that had been said in the last hour. Potter's taunting and cruelty. His own pleas. And Sirius's acceptance of them.

He didn't know what would happen next. He didn't know what to expect. Did something change between him in Sirius? He didn't think so, and yet the words, *I believe you*, continued to haunt him, both reassuring him and horrifying him.

Sirius stayed by his side, sitting on the bed next to him, running his fingers through his hair with an awkward tenderness of someone who was just as unaccustomed at giving comfort as Severus was at accepting it.

Eventually, Severus drifted off to sleep.

When he did, he dreamed of Dumbledore again.

.....

"The bond of your protection has been established," Dumbledore said. "It's time."

"When?" Severus asked grimly.

"Tomorrow."

"I don't want to do it," Severus said petulantly, probably sounding like a spoilt child rather than the unwavering soldier his leader needed him to be.

Dumbledore nodded but didn't argue. Instead the old wizard simply opened his arms to him. Severus went to him, the way he used to walk to his own father, hating him and loving him at once. He stood rigid in the embrace of the man he'd have to kill tomorrow, not daring to enjoy what might well be the last of the human affection for a long time.

"I'm sorry," Severus said sincerely. "I wish I could have gotten to you sooner. Maybe I could have contained the curse..."

Dumbledore chuckled amicably. "I imagine you were occupied, writhing under the Cruciatus at Voldemort's hands, after saving Sirius Black's life."

Severus froze, as the man's disfigured hand rested on his shoulder. Their gazes met.

"Severus, I am well aware that I can only begin to imagine the sacrifices you've made for all of us. I love you very deeply, child. For what it's worth, I'm sorry as well. I'm truly, deeply sorry for the horrible ways I've let you down in the past. Can you forgive me?"

He swallowed hard. "I'm not a very forgiving man, Dumbledore," Severus said evenly. "So you

should count yourself lucky that... I don't think there's anything to forgive."

.....

He woke up feeling groggy and dazed. He opened his eyes and saw Sirius sitting next to him, looking at him with concern.

"Hey," Sirius said. "How are you feeling?"

"Better," Severus whispered. "Thank you, Master."

"Nonsense. I didn't do anything," Sirius denied.

"You did... you told me what I needed to hear, even if you didn't mean it. It... helped, in the moment."

Sirius nodded absently. "Well, I'm glad that it helped."

Severus shifted in the bed, and pulled himself to sit up, unsuccessfully. The movement made him dizzy and he resolved to simply remain lying on his back. "I did .. break the terms of our agreement. I... claimed to be innocent. Are you going to send me back to prison?" Severus checked.

"Don't be an idiot," Sirius said. "Of course I'm not going to send you back to prison."

"Are you going to punish me?"

Sirius shook his head mutely.

"Why not?"

"Don't feel like it," Sirius said stiffly. "Get some rest if you want. Take your time. Come out when you're ready."

Sirius stood up and turned to leave the room.

"Did you really believe me?" Severus asked softly.

Sirius paused slightly. "Maybe I did. So what?" He left quickly after that, shutting the door quietly.

Severus remained in bed, clutching at the blanket with his hands. He should have felt something like relief, but the feeling of dread only intensified. Why should he be so fearful, so nauseated, so utterly horrified at the thought of Sirius believing him? It didn't make sense.

Eventually, he managed to sit up again. Still feeling dizzy and frail, he nonetheless began to walk.

He walked slowly and cautiously, leaning against the walls, afraid he might fall any moment. But he continued to walk regardless, knowing that Sirius was waiting for him.

Once he reached the armchair where Sirius was seated, Severus knelt on the floor in silence.

Sirius looked at him. "Hungry?"

"No, Master."

Sirius stretched his hand to touch his face and Severus shuddered at the contact.

“I thought we've been through this,” Sirius said. “It won't do to have you flinch away from my touch.”

“I'm sorry, Master,” Severus said.

“Let's try this again, shall we?”

“Yes, Master.”

The familiar hand stroked his cheek and caressed his neck. Severus felt clammy and cold.

“Severus? What is it?” Sirius asked.

Potter's words still rung in his ears, and Severus held still, trying to collect his thoughts.

Dumbledore is still dead, isn't he? And now – you're coddling his murderer, treating him as your little pet? That's not like you.

Everyone makes mistakes, Harry...

It was a mistake then?

“You really did believe me,” Severus whispered. “I could tell.”

Sirius's hand froze on his neck. “And?”

“You've known all along, haven't you?” Severus said numbly. “You knew I was innocent. You were one of the four. My last Custodian.”

He shut his eyes, preparing himself for an explosion of violence. But none came. Sirius's hand simply continued to stroke his hair soothingly.

“Yes,” Sirius said. “I was.”

To be continued soon

the rituals of belonging

Author's notes: SS/SB

the rituals of belonging

Severus remained kneeling, feeling growing smaller and weaker under the weight of Black's words. The sitting room was dark, so dark that he wondered if he might be going blind. Sirius rested his hand on his shoulder and stroked him soothingly and reassuringly.

“Why did Dumbledore name you?” Sirius asked. “That was...”

“An unlikely choice,” Black supplied with amusement. “But you know Dumbledore. He tended to believe the best of people.”

So he did, Severus thought numbly. Dumbledore rarely made mistakes, but when he did, they were always spectacular.

“Besides,” Black continued, “Dumbledore reckoned it'd do my soul some good to begin repaying my life-debt to you. Imagine that.”

Severus issued a brief, slightly hysterical laugh. “I *hate* life-debts.”

Sirius chuckled benignly. “Yes, I imagine you do.”

“Who were the others?” Severus demanded.

“Remus, Tonks and Minerva,” Sirius said, appearing not to mind the question.

The ones he'd dreamed about.

“What happened to them?” Severus asked.

“Remus and Tonks went on a mission together. Something unexpected happened... they got caught behind the enemy lines. Moody said to let them go, but McGonagall wouldn't hear of it. She gathered up a team. Molly and Arthur, Percy, the twins, Poppy, Flitwick and Hagrid went to try and rescue them. By the time the rest of us knew they'd gone, it was all over. They failed. We found them, what was left on them, on the battlefield. Their remains were so mangled, and fused together, we didn't bother separating them. Just buried them all together in a common grave.” Sirius's fingers entwined between the strands of Severus's hair. “I imagine it was then that the bond had summoned you home.”

“Yes,” Severus muttered. “So .. why? Why did you let me go to prison? Why didn't you speak for me?”

“Well,” Black mused. “I was going to. I really was. When I got word that you were back, and under arrest, I was preparing to testify. And then... I realized that I didn't have to. I was the only one who knew. Nobody knew you were innocent, and nobody knew I was your Custodian. Not even you. The information hidden within me was magically protected, and couldn't be extracted by anyone. It was a perfect opportunity,” Black said calmly. “To finally get what I always wanted.”

“What you always wanted,” Severus repeated mindlessly.

“To make you mine. Just like this. Resistance and defiance gone, replaced with submission. Pliant, willing to be molded and made into what I want.”

“You gave orders to the guards, and others, to punish me if I said I was innocent?” Severus guessed. It really didn't matter much, but he was curious.

“Yes,” Black admitted remorselessly. “I thought it'd be easier that way.”

“You let me go to prison to break me?” Severus couldn't help but issue a dry, hoarse laugh.

“You've used others, my former comrades to... turn me into this? I'd have thought you'd want the pleasure for yourself.”

“Incorrect, as usual,” Black said dryly. “I use others to do my work for me whenever I can. The incident in the Shrieking Shack should have taught you that.”

Severus nodded tiredly. “You were going to use Remus then. You wanted me to become infected, so that I'd be dependent on you,” he said bitterly. “Had I become like Remus, I'd be totally dependent on you and your gang of illegal Animagi. To stay sane, to keep my mind human during the transformations, to remain in school. I would have been at your mercy.”

“It wouldn't have been so bad,” Sirius said. “Your life with me isn't bad, is it? You're safe. You have some pleasure. You know where you belong.”

“True,” Severus conceded. “Why did you tell me now?”

“It doesn't matter anymore,” Black said simply. “You may as well know the truth. You know you can't go back to the way you used to be. You'll never be the same. You're mine now, and you'll always be mine.”

“Yes,” Severus agreed tiredly, as the resignation had set in one more time. “Always yours.”

Maybe the confession of slavery shouldn't have come so easily, so effortlessly. Maybe he should have resisted. Maybe he should have cursed Black to his face... But the brief flicker of rage and defiance had died as quickly as it appeared. He knew he'd lost.

Sirius rose to his feet and pushed him down to stand on all fours. Severus complied, and his entire body shuddered when Sirius pushed his legs open, and his fingers insinuated themselves into him.

“Relax,” Sirius demanded. “Don't fight me.”

He held still at first, but when Sirius thrust into him, his body responded to the familiar presence. He found himself pushing back, cooperating with his own taking. It was a gentle, slow, luxurious pace for both of them, as Sirius held his hips, and eventually slid his hand to grasp his cock.

“Tell me you're mine. Call me Master,” Sirius demanded.

“I'm yours, Master,” he said, feeling the last of him and what he used to be being obliterated, vanishing into nothingness.

For the next little while nothing existed but the physical sensations. When Sirius drove into him, he pushed back hard, meeting him. When Sirius pulled out, he pushed forward to meet the hand that continued to stroke his erection. Losing himself in the moment, he continued to move with mindless, animalistic desperation, until he finally came, and until Sirius climaxed inside him.

Afterwards, they lay on the floor together, with Sirius holding him in a strangely affectionate way.

“I love you,” Sirius said suddenly.

Love. He tried to remember what that was, and couldn't. Something about a red-haired girl, laughing at him, tugging on his green-silver scarf, making a mess of his books. Something about making her angry, driving her away, yet continuing to think of her just the same. Something about trying to protect her, save her. It was so long ago, so very long ago. Another age, another lifetime.

She was gone now, along with almost everyone else, along with anyone who might have cared what became of him. Only her eyes had survived, dwelling on the face of the young man who had screamed at Sirius, berating him for loving Severus.

Love. Was *this* it? Lying on the floor, his thighs covered with the come of the man who'd betrayed him, and not caring? Somehow he thought love should be more than that. But maybe there could never be more. He no longer knew.

But he knew that some sort of response was expected.

“I love you too, Master,” Severus said hesitantly. He wondered if Sirius could see through the obvious lie, the lie that a broken, mindless shell could love someone. But Sirius simply nodded, and stroked his forehead, wiping down the trickle of sweat.

“Come to bed with me tonight,” Sirius whispered. “Sleep next to me. Will you?”

“If you wish, Master.”

“What is it that you want?” Sirius asked.

“I want to sleep here. By the fire.”

Sirius looked at him sadly. “Why?”

“I'm used to it,” Severus said honestly.

He felt the strong arms lift him up off the floor and embrace him briefly.

“Fine,” Sirius said, and departed, leaving him alone.

In silence, Severus crawled to the fireplace, and stretched himself out next to it. The rest of the house was dark, and the blackness of the night was pouring through the windows, gathering in the corners of the large sitting room, obscuring the walls and the doors.

In spite of the fire, he felt cold again. He reached for the change of Muggle clothes that Sirius had given him earlier and put them on. That helped some, but he still moved to lie right next to the fireplace, so that he was almost touching it. He curled into himself, turning his back to the fire.

He fell asleep quickly. No dreams came this time. All that came was the dark, pitch-black void of oblivion that was completely and utterly boundless, and yet, only big enough to contain one.

to be concluded...

the runner's strength

Author's notes: ss/sb

the runner's strength

In the dark space between waking and sleep, Severus felt someone reach for him. Three pairs of arms were holding him up, three voices were speaking in unison, telling him to wake up.

He opened his eyes. He was still at the Grimmauld Place. But he wasn't alone.

He saw Remus and Tonks, sitting next to him on the floor. They looked younger than he'd remembered them, and their faces were both sadder and brighter. He saw Minerva as well, staring at him from above the rim of her glasses with a motherly concern on her face.

"Hey there," Remus said, obviously trying for lightheartedness, but failing. "Did you miss us?"

"I did," Severus confessed. "I didn't know why... but I did. I do. I dream of you all the time."

"We've missed you too, child," Minerva said gently, shaking her head. "And we dream of you too. Do you know who we are?"

"My Custodians," Severus said quietly. "Are you real?"

The moment the words left his lips, he lowered his gaze, cursing himself mentally for such a foolish question. Of course they weren't real. He'd lost his mind, and started hallucinating. He wasn't entirely surprised that it finally happened. The only surprise was that he'd lasted this long.

"Oh, we're real," Tonks said quickly, as if sensing his thoughts. "Don't doubt yourself, or us. We are a part of you. We live in your blood, as you live in ours." She stretched out her hand and Severus grasped it firmly, surprised by how real it felt.

"Will you take me with you?" Severus asked longingly. More than anything, he suddenly wanted to go with them, and it didn't even matter where, as long as he could dream with them, without ever having to wake up.

The three Custodians seemed taken aback by his words, and for a while they all sat in silence together.

"I'm sorry," Severus offered hesitantly. "I can't even imagine what a disappointment I must be to you. You died fighting. Didn't end up like this... didn't lose your strength..."

"You haven't lost it either," Tonks said. "You've got a great deal of strength. Your strength is like the runner's strength. You know what a good runner is like, don't you? Light on his feet, running tall and proud and straight. There's both wholeness and economy in his movements." Her voice was measured and quiet, and there seemed to be a whole other layer of meaning to her words, that Severus couldn't begin to grasp. "That's you," Tonks said, smiling, squeezing his hand. "A runner."

He shook his head numbly, sitting up on the floor in the home of his captor under the gazes of his dead protectors.

"I don't understand," he confessed softly. "What are you saying?"

"I thought it'd be obvious," Minerva said. "You need to run."

"I don't understand... run? The doors are warded..."

"Maybe they are, maybe they aren't," Remus said smiling very slightly. "But unless you try, you'll never find out."

"Even if I get outside, then what?" Severus continued to argue. "The house is being watched. I won't make it."

"Don't worry about that," Minerva said. "Don't worry about the details. All you need to do is get up, and run."

"I don't want to run," Severus said tiredly. "I'm tired of running."

"I know," Remus said. "You must be very tired. Who wouldn't be? But you have to run. Please. Trust me."

Severus shook his head. "There's nothing for me out there..."

"Run." Minerva's voice was flat and strict, as she cut him off. "Now."

"I can't!" Severus whispered back desperately.

Tonks and Remus stood up, and grabbed his arms, pulling him up to his feet forcefully. He felt dizzy from the sudden change in position, and swayed slightly, but Remus grabbed his shoulders and didn't let him fall.

"RUN!!!" Tonks screamed at him, her shrill voice echoing through the old headquarters of the Order.

Her order sent a shiver down his spine, but his feet refused to obey him.

"I can't..." he whispered, feeling physically glued to the floor. "Can't...Just can't. Let me be..."

"RUN!!!" Remus shouted, giving him a firm shove. His voice was joined by the voices of the other two.

"RUN!!!"

He felt the hands of his Custodians urging him to move, pushing him, physically dragging him along, making him move.

"Please, child," Minerva pleaded with him tearfully. "Listen to us. Run. Just run."

Something snapped, something broke inside, and suddenly, nothing mattered. Not the terrors of prison, not the fear of getting caught, not long-dead hopes for justice, not the insincere declarations of love. The only thing that mattered was *running*.

He finally found his strength and ran. The room became a blur around him. He might have heard Black's footsteps chasing him, but there was no stopping now.

He reached the door, and to his shock it swung open before him, as if an invisible force made it yield just for him.

He continued to run.

Once he'd made it into the Muggle streets, the bright morning light blinded him. Unaccustomed to daylight and to open spaces, he felt disoriented and confused. His vision was blurred. His ears were ringing. He may have heard Muggle cars break and honk wildly, he may have heard people shout at him, but he wasn't sure of anything, other than the fact that he was running.

He kept running wildly and blindly, as fast as he could, feeling short of breath.

He bumped into someone, and when his gaze finally focused, he found himself staring at Potter. The green eyes burned dangerously amidst the disfigured landscape of Harry's face.

"Le-gilimens," Severus hissed hoarsely, gasping for air. With his last breath, he whispered again, begging, hoping Potter would understand, and look into his mind. "Leg-li-mens!"

Harry grabbed him by the shoulders and shouted something at him. He didn't know what. He couldn't hear anything.

But he could see vaguely that Black was running towards them, closing the distance between them quickly.

When Sirius finally caught up with them and spoke, he could finally make out the words.

"Thank you, Harry," Sirius said breathlessly. "He tried to run."

"Yes, brilliant as I am, I worked it out," Harry said with amusement.

"I'm sorry to inconvenience you. I'll take him home."

Severus choked down a desperate sob. *Legilimens!* He thought. *Legilimens!*

"No," Harry said, moving to stand between Severus and Black.

"Harry..."

"You've betrayed us," Harry said, looking directly at Sirius. "Don't even try to deny it."

"What on earth are you talking about?" Sirius demanded angrily.

"You knew he was *innocent*," Harry said flatly. "I knew that the moment I saw him in your house. You *knew*, and you've said nothing. You've betrayed him, and in doing so, you've betrayed all of us."

"What do you care? What is he to you? He's a Death Eater! Did you know that he's the one who murdered your parents! He's the one who'd conveyed the prophecy to Voldemort! He told me himself!"

His secret disclosed, Severus stilled, waiting for Potter to recoil from him in revulsion and abandon him.

But Harry just shook his head, seeming undisturbed by the revelation. "Even if that's true, you must take some of the blame as well," Harry said evenly. "You knew they were in danger. You knew one of the Marauders was a spy. Why did you make them choose a different Secret Keeper? Was it cowardice? Were you scared? Did you want to play it safe?"

"No," Sirius whispered numbly. "Was angry...didn't want to do anything for them... was too

angry..."

"Angry with my father," Harry guessed quietly. "Yes?"

"Yes!" Black shouted.

Harry stared at Sirius intently.

"For saving Snape from you," Harry guessed. "Must have been quite a blow to your ego."

Black shook his head mutely.

"Not just ego," Severus muttered, surprised to hear his own voice. "He wanted to infect me. Force me into dependence..."

"Oh," Harry said softly, and stared at Sirius. "No wonder you were so angry with them both. My father, for keeping you away from your prize, and my mother, for continuing to be the object of his devotion, even after she became unattainable. Were you angry enough to abandon them in their greatest hour of need?"

"Harry! I loved them, you must believe that..."

"I'm sure you did, in your own way," Harry agreed. "I think that's why you were so broken-hearted when they died. You've allowed yourself to be taken to Azkaban without a word of protest, without bothering to state your innocence. You've served your own, self-chosen penance there for a long time, haven't you?"

Black nodded again absently, but his misty gaze was focused only on Severus.

"Harry, I'm – sorry, but you mustn't interfere. He's mine. Let me have him..."

"He's not yours," Harry said flatly. "He's not anyone's."

Sirius moved instantaneously. His wand flew out and a spell was about to emerge from his lips. Harry was faster by a half. His own wand was drawn at lightning speed, and one silent spell later, Black collapsed onto the ground, motionless.

Time slowed down to a crawl, as Harry and Severus stood next to each other, each absorbed in his own thoughts. After what seemed like an eternity later, the team of Aurors approached them. One of the Aurors conjured a stretcher, while the others deposited Black's unconscious body on it.

Finally, Severus broke the uncomfortable silence. "You really guessed the moment you saw me in the house?" he asked.

Harry nodded. "Yes. By the way, that's why I was so harsh with you. I wanted to provoke him into making a confession. Pity that it didn't work."

"It helped," Severus said quietly. "It got me thinking, and enabled me to make the correct guess. That Sirius was my Custodian. Then..." He paused slightly.

"Then what?" Harry asked.

For a moment Severus was tempted to tell him about having seen Remus, Tonks and McGonagall, but caution and common sense prevailed. He just escaped from one type of prison. He wasn't about to be marooned in St. Mungo's for confessing hallucinations and delusions.

“Then I ran,” Severus said simply.

Harry nodded, and gave him a long, thoughtful look. “Well. I guess you're free again.”

Severus tried the word on his lips.

“Free.” At this point, he didn't really know what it meant. But for some reason, he thought he should be happy about it.

“What will happen to him?” Severus asked, looking at his treacherous Custodian.

“After the trial?” Harry asked. “I don't know. Maybe prison for life. Maybe the Killing Curse. Do you care?”

“I... don't think so,” Severus admitted. “As long as I never see him again, I don't care.”

A small, and almost human smile appeared on Potter's disfigured face, making it look strangely sad.

“I think I can arrange that.”

To be concluded.

epilogue

Author's notes: SS/SB

epilogue

Two weeks after the trial, Severus began to come to grips with being human again. It felt strange waking up in a bed, getting dressed, having nobody to tell him what to do, how to eat, what to fetch. He floundered terribly without a direction and purpose, eventually finding a way to cope and make it through the small human tasks that came naturally to most people, but took him hours to complete.

Potter came to visit him eventually. They sat down at the kitchen table and Harry opened a bottle of champagne. The cork popped out and the foam emerged from the bottle, dripping down the side.

"I must say, you look ghastly, Professor. I didn't think it was possible, but you look even worse than you looked the year Lupin taught DADA, and that's saying something."

Severus chuckled quietly, both relieved and dismayed that never again he'd be someone's beautiful, prized possession.

"You know something, Potter? Three months from now, I'll have a healthy skin tone again, and you'll still be ugly."

Harry snorted. "Always the optimist, I see." He poured the wine into two tea mugs, in the absence of anything else at Spinner's Place. They toasted each other in silence. Harry's gaze fell on his hand that held a mug in the slightly awkward manner, undoubtedly noting how damaged it was.

"No potions?" Harry asked calmly.

"No potions. Too much damage to the hands."

"Can still hold a wand though?" Harry probed.

"Yes. Can still do that."

Harry nodded thoughtfully. "That's good. What are you going to do?"

"I don't know," Severus confessed. "Don't care. Don't know how to care." A part of him screamed in protest at confessing any sort of weakness in front of Potter, but another part reveled in the liberation the confession brought with it. "It all seems too much. I got used to being owned."

Harry nodded. "Hmm. Maybe we all did. Dumbledore's men, through and through. He'd kept us on a short leash, and look at us now. We haven't done well with freedom."

He scowled, not wanting to speak ill of the dead, but hearing the bitter truth in Potter's words. He stood up abruptly and drained his mug in one quick gulp.

"Going to leave?" Harry asked neutrally.

"Yes. Soon."

A kind of restless, nostalgic longing appeared with Harry's words.

He didn't quite know what to make of it, but suddenly and unexpectedly, Severus realized that he wanted to go somewhere else. Someplace where nobody knew him, where nobody had a reason to loathe him, or laud him, or pity him, or apologize to him. He was tired.

Maybe his three faithful Custodians were right. He was done now. He did all that was required of him. And he lived, and reached a point where nothing was demanded of him any longer.

“Where are you going to go?” Harry asked.

“I don't know yet,” Severus said simply. “But I think... someplace bright.”

~ the end

Author's note: And we're done. It's over. Liked? Hated? Blah? Please review. Thanks for reading.

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